

Global burden of stroke

"I waked and sat up...when I felt a confusion and indistinctness in my head which lasted, I suppose about half a minute. Soon after I perceived that I had suffered a paralytick stroke, and that my Speech was taken from me."
Samuel Johnson, England, 1783



Stroke is the brain equivalent of a heart attack. Blood must flow to and through the brain for it to function. If its flow is obstructed, by a blood clot moving to the brain, or by narrowing or bursting of blood vessels, the brain loses its energy supply, causing damage to tissues leading to stroke.

Annually, 15 million people worldwide suffer a stroke. Of these, 5 million die and another 5 million are left permanently disabled, placing a burden on family and community. Stroke is uncommon in people under 40 years; when it does occur, the main cause is high blood pressure. Stroke also occurs in about 8% of children with sickle cell disease.

The major risk factors for stroke are similar to those for coronary heart disease, with high blood pressure and tobacco use the most significant modifiable risks. Atrial fibrillation, heart failure and heart attack are other important risk factors.

The incidence of stroke is declining in many developed countries, largely as a result of better control of high blood pressure, and reduced levels of smoking. However, the absolute number of strokes continues to increase because of the ageing population.

The increased risk of stroke from taking oral contraceptive pills is substantially reduced by using the modern, low-dose pill.

Stroke is the biggest single cause of major disability in the United Kingdom.

Treating hypertension can reduce the risk of a stroke by up to 40%.

Stroke burden is projected to rise from around 38 million DALYs globally in 1990 to 61 million DALYs in 2020.

